INSIDE EREC

**Story and Photos by
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THE recruit moves through the Military Entrance Processing Station, stopping at each table, filling out papers and moving on, while the brown folder under his arm grows thicker. At the final stop he hands over the folder. So begins the journey of the Military Personnel Records Jacket, more commonly known as the 201 file.

The first stop of many for this recruit's history of service is the Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center, in Indianapolis, Ind. There, a personal database for the soldier is created. There, too, is the personnel folder's final stop when the soldier separates or retires from service.

Many soldiers have seen the records system evolve from a paper-trail process to today's electronic version that seems second nature to the new recruit.

"At EREC we see ourselves as 'transformation leaders,'" said COL Reuben Jones, the facility's commander. "We develop the tools to provide service to the soldier. We're willing to make changes, and deliver those changes to help the soldier."

From scanning that first document to helping a soldier prepare for promotion, EREC is designing new systems to help service members. To do this EREC is divided into three divisions and an information support team responsible for software and program development and network security.

Enlisted Records Division

Some of the biggest changes have taken place in the Enlisted Records Division. It's there that the electronic record is born.

"We maintain every document

inside every record of every active-duty soldier," said Tony Eclavea, chief of the Records Division. "Records for those retiring and separating are maintained here for 60 to 90 days and then sent to St. Louis, Mo. We currently store approximately 469,000 records here electronically."

A tour through the division begins at the mail point, where each year roughly 1.6 million pieces of mail are sorted and distributed. "Most mail consists of documents that need to be added to someone's records. With the advent of 'field-to-file' we've reduced the amount of mail and the cost of postage to the soldier," said Eclavea.

With the OMPF available online, requests for the outdated microfiche file has dropped from 22,000 a month to roughly 5,000 a month.

Sorted mail is distributed throughout the division. New records from MEPS are gathered and scanned into the database at a rate of 1,000 to 1,200 pages an hour, Eclavea said.

This is the beginning of the electronic personnel record. The process is a mystery to new recruits, but for NCOs preparing to go before promotion boards this system becomes a lifeline to their military records.

"Using OMPF online saves soldiers time and money. Before, if they wanted to add documents for the promotion boards they'd mail them in and sometimes come here, paying their own way, to see their records and ensure the necessary items made it," said Eclavea. "Now they can use digital senders and within 24 hours their personnel service units can verify the documents made it to their records.

"Since October 2001 we've been using the digital sender at more than 100 sites worldwide. It's still primarily a tool for personnel offices, but small units can also use this system," he added. "With this in place we are now receiving 70,000 fewer documents in the mail each year."

"We currently store 27 million pages of retrievable data in our system," said Calvin Barker, who oversees the network storage systems.

"We've been using a Personnel Electronic Records Management System since 1994, which allowed us to convert data into microfiche form. A newer system, Network Attach Storage, allows us to store just the data needed for the OMPF, which gives soldiers quick access to their records."

The current system allows up to 10,000 users to access information at any one time. But users

SSG David Gould from Fort Knox, Ky., checks his records at EREC's Customer Service Division. Soldiers travel to EREC from around the world in preparation for promotion boards.

can rest assured that their personal information cannot be viewed by others. The personal data found on the 27 million pages in the system is stored monthly on digital tape that is tightly secured.

New initiatives within the Records Division include assisting with the new online promotion-board system, working on a secure e-mail system for documents, and assisting the records warehouse in St. Louis with digitizing old records.

"We think about active-Army, National Guard and Reserve soldiers, as well as retirees, in everything we do here," Jones said, "so we'll assist other agencies when they need help. It's a one-Army concept."

≋ Senior Enlisted Promotion Board

For staff sergeants and below, getting promoted is a local issue. They work with their personnel offices to update records, fill out promotion-point worksheets and prepare for military-knowledge boards.

▲ A new concept for the future of promotion boards includes an online preview of a soldier's record and official photo.

◀ Calvin Barker of EREC's Records Division checks the main database housing online OMPF information *(main photo).* All enlisted military records are backed-up on magnetic tape *(top inset),* with a back-up to the back-up on optical disks *(lower inset).*

With the OMPF available online, the number of requests for the outdated microfiche file has dropped from 22,000 a month to roughly 5,000 a month.

Once the excitement of promotion to staff sergeant passes, it's time to begin preparing for the centralized promotion boards, which are coordinated by and conducted at EREC.

Maintaining good personal records is important for every soldier, especially those being considered for senior-level promotions, Jones said. Preparing for the centralized promotion board begins by visiting the local personnel office for a records update and having an official photo taken.

"The process begins with soldiers verifying their Personnel Qualification Records, which arrive at EREC before the boards convene," said SGM Kathleen Pavlon. "If errors are found, the soldiers are notified through their AKO addresses so they can make the necessary changes."

The new digital photos being used today must still be followed up by hard copy prints sent to EREC.

The EREC team knows that some soldiers' mission requirements can make this process a daunting task, so they're always looking at initiatives to make board preparations easier.

One initiative was OMPF Online, which lets soldiers see what the promotion board sees and know what items need to be updated. The digital photos also allow soldiers to see what will be presented to the board.

"We want to automate all of this information," said CPT Jerry Wood, the board recorder. "We're working to establish a common, automated board-interface program that is fair and equitable for all soldiers in the zone of consideration."

Using an interface system that links a soldier's personal data into one system will not only help ease preparing for the board, but will aid board members in the review process, Wood said.

Records Services Division

If the Enlisted Records Division is the record keeper for EREC, and the

Department of the Army Secretariat for Promotion Boards is the gateway to the future of the enlisted soldier, then the Records Services Division is the glue that binds them together.

"We're the division that answers the soldiers' questions or assists with their records," said Sylvia Davis, RSD's chief. "We have three branches: Personnel Actions, NCOER and Customer Service."

The biggest project being handled within Personnel Actions is the Date Initial Entry Military Service, or DIEMS, project. Soldiers should verify their dates online at **www. perscom.army.mil** — the correctness of the date is critical, since it determines which retirement plan the soldier falls under.

The personnel actions section also handles all inquiries regarding the World Wide Locater and the Qualitative Management Program, and processes NCOER appeals.

"If soldiers need to make changes in their records, we will do that. And if there are legal questions, we will look into them," said Wanda Willis, chief of the Personnel Actions Branch.

Verification and review of documents is important to every division within EREC, but for the NCOER section that review is vital to maintaining on-time and accurate reports, said MSG Gary Adams of the NCOER

section. He said the types of errors his team reviews are those that the local personnel staff normally wouldn't be looking for.

Other EREC initiatives include:
• Online NCOER tracking for personnel-service centers. "The PSB can check when a soldier's NCOER was processed and if any errors were found," said Adams.

• Online NCOER. This system will allow access to the rating form by the soldier, rater and senior rater. Input and changes will be made online and stored on an EREC server.

For soldiers who still want to check their records at EREC, the customer-service department provides individual stations where they can do so privately and at their convenience.

"Many younger soldiers are comfortable with using OMPF Online, but a lot of supervisors still recommend soldiers come here to check their records and drop off documents they want added," said SFC John Solie, the customer-service NCOIC.

"We strongly encourage soldiers to call us at (DSN) 699-3735 or toll free at (866) 771-6357 so we can work together to update or correct their records without them spending time or money to come here," Solie said. "Basically, all problems can be corrected with good two-way communication."
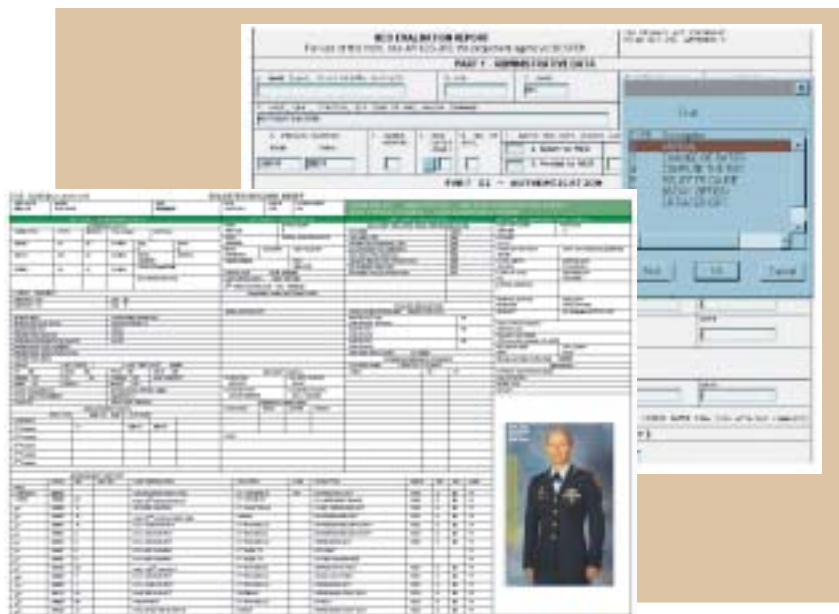
Among other new EREC initiatives are the online records brief *(front)* and the new online NCOER.